Whether to live with evils and their legacies is seldom a choice. The questions are about how to do it well, especially, how to interrupt cycles of hostility generated by past evils and replace mutual ill will with good.

Claudia Card, *The Atrocity Paradigm*

University of Alberta

Encountering Unwanted Togetherness: Deconstructing an Ethic of Forgiveness

by

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ABSTRACT

My thesis offers a philosophical and psychological examination of our ability to forgive strangers post-atrocity. Forgiveness is often considered impossible because atrocities involve unforgivable violations of moral values. Viewed through the lens of deconstruction, however, it is precisely where forgiveness seems impossible that it becomes possible, and more importantly, necessary in order to curb the desire for vengeance. Granting this radical understanding of the value of forgiveness—the ability to forgive the unforgivable—what hinders our ability to forgive? My work focuses on public vindictiveness towards Karla Homolka, who was released in 2005, having served her 12-year sentence for her role in the rape and murder of 14-year-old Leslie Mahaffy and 15-year-old Kristen French. My thesis aims to show how reflective engagement with forgiveness can tell us something about ourselves as ethical persons by demonstrating how and why our ongoing resentment towards others is often morally unjustified.

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To my mother,
Mary Hunt

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INTRODUCTION:

Encountering the Other Through Forgiveness

I began thinking about forgiveness a year ago upon hearing that Karla Homolka, now Karla Teale, had been released from prison after serving her twelve-year plea-bargain sentence (she testified against her then-husband Paul Bernardo) for her role in the abduction, rape, torture and murder of 14-year-old Leslie Mahaffy and 15-year-old Kristen French.[1] I was eleven when I first heard the news of their deaths, and a 14-year-old high school student when Karla Homolka and Paul Bernardo were sentenced. Twelve years later, I was living in Montreal for the summer, watching the French news, when I saw a face that haunted me. Karla Teale, a 35 year-old Anglophone now speaking French in an interview, announcing her plans to settle in Montreal.

Teale was released from the Joliette penitentiary and settled in the Montreal suburb of Longueuil. I was living in Notre-Dame-de-Grace (NDG) at the time, a neighborhood just west of downtown. NDG was one of the neighborhoods Teale had considered moving to. I started thinking of how I would feel if I ever ran into Karla Homolka, if we ever met in the street. Thinking of this unlikely yet not impossible encounter brought me to think concretely about how I would respond to seeing her. Thinking about this hypothetical encounter still baffles me. Could I face her without being swept up in hatred? Could I accept that she deserves to be left alone, that she ought to be given a second chance? While the actual encounter might turn out to be banal, the thought experiment seems less so. It brings up all kinds of conflicting responses; how I would respond to her is informed by my moral and political convictions. Ethically, at my most charitable moments, I feel that I have moral obligations of varying degrees towards all people.

Politically it seems, however, it is less clear where my obligations lie. I am pulled in different directions, where my loyalties conflict with rather than complement each other. The media (as well as many popular feminist engagements with Homolka) split her case into a debate between two opposing sides: on one side, Homolka was portrayed as a willing collaborator in the horrific crimes (video footage of the attacks, recorded by Bernardo, show Homolka administering drugs to the victims and raping them). On the other side, however, Homolka was depicted as a compliant victim of her abusive and sadistic husband, Paul Bernardo (who is currently serving a life sentence for his role in the murders).[2] In one depiction, Teale appears perhaps forgivable, in the other much less so. Lacking in these accounts however is any room for complexity or serious philosophical reflection. The dichotomy dictated by the media is also maintained in the public's consciousness; there continues to be a national inability to move beyond the brutal yet titillating details of the girls' deaths, and perhaps a romanticized story of the most notorious female killer in Canadian history.

An imagined encounter with the woman who participated in the rape and murder of these two girls brings up all sorts of questions that remain unengaged in the general debate. Do I, as a third party, have the responsibility, or even the right, to forgive Homolka? How does the resentment held against an unforgivable criminal affect communities? What does forgiveness of the seemingly unforgivable entail, and, who does it involve? What can we learn from forgiveness between strangers, and perhaps most importantly, what happens next?

Encountering Forgiveness as a Response to Unwanted togetherness

Karla Homolka's actions do not fall neatly within the realm of what is often considered forgivable. In a preliminary attempt to try to situate Homolka's actions within a range of behaviors, Claudia Card's insights concerning atrocities are helpful. Card distinguishes between paradigm forgiveness and non-paradigmatic cases. Paradigm cases of forgiveness are those we most often encounter; cases in which the wrongdoer and the injured party are able to reconcile or at least move on from the harm caused. Non-paradigmatic cases, however,

> …include those in which the offender does not admit wrongdoing, or is no longer living, or in which the offender is living but not sorry, or is unwilling or unable to express contrition, or the offence is especially heinous, or the victim is no longer living, […] or both are groups (such as nations), rather than individual persons. Some evils, such as genocide, are perpetrated not just by individuals but by groups—national, religious, ethnic, or racial. (Card 2002, 175)

Homolka's actions appear to correspond to the non-paradigmatic scene in that the crime is especially heinous and the victims are no longer alive. Moreover, the public's indignation against Teale is also non-paradigmatic, insofar as it is generally those harmed more directly who tend to resent the wrongdoer. In any case, non-paradigmatic cases create an altogether different set of questions, including, how we should respond to the complicated and desperately difficult social situations that arise post-atrocity. More specifically, how do we even entertain the possibility of forgiving a woman who committed such heinous acts against two young girls?

Instances of non-paradigmatic forgiveness involve a kind of significant and difficult 'togetherness'. My understanding of 'togetherness'—which will be central to Chapter Three—is dependent partly upon what Zygmunt Bauman refers to as various distinct patterns of interaction.[3] Each different form of interaction shapes our sense of moral responsibility and responsiveness to others. Simply put, 'togetherness' is a term used to encapsulate a myriad of ways of being together in interpersonal relations. 'Difficult togetherness' (also called 'unwanted togetherness'), as one form of togetherness, is defined by encounters involving massive moral injury, wherein we are brought up against what is unimaginable, ineffable and self-annihilating. These encounters include rape, torture, and genocide, as well as traumatic experiences and losses more generally, where trauma entails an emotional wound that creates substantial and long-lasting damage to one's psychological development (c.f. Brison, 1997). Part of this damage is caused by an "incapacity to respond adequately to a terrible and shattering event… and to make meaning from the ruins" (Britzman, 32). Said differently, difficult togetherness involves damages to the self that make responding adequately—let alone ethically—appear exceptionally demanding. This kind of togetherness makes interactions with those responsible for the trauma unbearable and unimaginable; the release of Karla Teale, therefore, forces upon the community an unwanted sense of togetherness.

Within this realm of difficult togetherness, I am specifically interested in situations involving forgiveness between strangers, as opposed to between family members, neighbors, lovers, etc. Whereas forgiveness between acquaintances is implemented as a way to reconcile broken

relationships, non-paradigmatic cases involving forgiveness between strangers create an unusual relationship. Here, a common motivation to forgive is lacking: namely, a desire or need to mend or ameliorate an existing relationship.[4] In cases involving violence between strangers, there is no previous relationship to mend, making the common incentive to reconcile absent. Moreover, because we often use what we know about the wrongdoer to justify, excuse or mitigate her or his harmful actions, forgiving someone we don't know is more difficult because we lack a perspective from which to view the wrongdoer more compassionately.

The possibility of forgiveness between strangers post-atrocity is rendered nearly impossible because, as Claudia Card points out, an atrocity involves a severe violation of societal values. Whereas insults, cheating and unfairness evoke resentment, anger and indignity, Card distinguishes the intensity of those reactions from the rage and condemnation that atrocities evoke (2002, 176). Other names taken up to signify such violations include the unforgivable or radical evil (Derrida 2005, and Kant 1794, respectively). Evils of this magnitude, perpetrated by strangers, make forgiveness appear not only unattainable, but also inappropriate. What grounds could the parents of French and Mahaffy have for even contemplating forgiveness in response to the strangers responsible for the deaths of their children? While there is important work to be done in addressing forgiveness between acquaintances, as well as in addressing forgiving less-traumatic wrongs, my investigation will concentrate on exploring cases of forgiveness between strangers post-atrocity.[5] This exploration will emphasize and grapple with the problems posed by the release of Karla Teale, whose actions seem to exemplify the difficulty of non-paradigmatic scenes of forgiveness.

Forgiveness between strangers in situations of unwanted togetherness raises nuanced questions of our psychological dependence on others. In the feminist account of a relational self an account of togetherness that emphasizes how our 'selves' are constituted by, rather than simply influenced by, our relations with other people. This account goes beyond more individualistic understandings of togetherness that might be described, to varying degrees, using Zygmunt Bauman's terms, "being-aside" and "being-with" (1995, 50). In both of these modes of togetherness, we exist in the world alongside other people but fail to change or be changed in any meaningful way by our encounters with them. However, a feminist conception of the relational self recognizes that our relationships with both strangers and friends meaningfully shape how we come to understand ourselves and even who we are. How we understand ourselves then shapes the way we respond to others. As Susan Brison points out, "on this view the self is both autonomous and socially dependent, vulnerable enough to be undone by violence and yet resilient enough to be reconstructed with the help of empathetic others" (1997, 12). The notion of the relational self acknowledges that the kind of relationship evoked by unwanted togetherness creates an interpersonal dynamic wherein we can be both destroyed and rebuilt through our interactions with others, whether we know them or not.

Thinking Philosophically and Reflectively

In order to contemplate these difficult questions, I will be examining forgiveness though both concrete and philosophical points-of-view, with a focus on *actual forms* of forgiveness. After all, forgiveness, with all of the attendant subtleties, is realized at the level of experience. Philosophers often bracket off the messiness of the real world, turning instead to the purer and

more controllable realm of pure thought (Brison 1997, 13). Deborah P. Britzman calls this the illusion that "knowledge can work to dissolve the problem of ethics" (2000, 37). While I am committed to exploring philosophical theories of forgiveness, abstract and theoretical meanings need to be brought into conversation with the actual practice of forgiveness.

The reflective point-of-view calls on me to notice the affective aspects of my own lived experience of forgiveness. I want to avoid allowing my theoretical investigation of forgiveness to overshadow crucial self-reflection—asking what I would and should actually do in the imagined encounter with Teale. In fact, I want to show how philosophical contemplation of alternative forms of forgiveness has brought me to imagine other ways of reacting to situations of unwanted togetherness, and to conflict more generally. Affective reflection creates psychological space from which to contemplate experiences and memories that I don't understand, that scare me, and that challenge my views, wants, needs, and concerns. My project extends beyond my own experience of forgiveness, however; it is one voice engaged in the exploration of forgiveness more generally. Incorporating both self-reflection and theory allows me to maintain the integrity of the philosophical and affective difficulties of interpersonal forgiveness.

It should be noted that the following is not a normative account of whether Karla Teale ought to be forgiven. Rather, it is an invitation, first of all, to examine the circumstances that make considerations of forgiveness (im)possible in situations involving, for instance, the rape, torture and murder of someone's child, and, secondly, to reflect upon what would need

to take place in oneself and one's relationships in order to keep such a possibility open.

From Conventional to More Radical Understandings of Forgiveness

My thesis aims to show how reflective engagement with forgiveness can tell us something about ourselves as ethical persons. In Chapter One, I begin by spelling out some general and undisputed conditions of forgiveness. Following that, I point out the key components of forgiveness, *as it is most commonly understood.* This conventional version of forgiveness generally has reconciliatory or retributive ends: it is understood as a viable way to mend past relationships, or judge past wrongs. In contrast to this view, I propose an *intersubjective understanding of forgiveness* that views forgiveness as a viable way to overcome one's feelings of resentment toward and desires for revenge against the wrongdoer. In support of the intersubjective view, I suggest that a) our tendency to resent is informed by a conventional attachment to justice that perpetuates, rather than challenges, retributive cycles of violence, and b) that such resentment is morally unjustifiable. Moreover, whereas the conventional view is concerned with the steps necessary to attain forgiveness, assuming its merit in advance, the intersubjective view is concerned with what makes forgiveness an appropriate response in the first place. Contrasting these perspectives allows interesting questions to arise: What informs the conventional understanding of forgiveness? What are the implications of this understanding for offenders like Karla Teale? Moreover, what does this understanding tell us about togetherness more generally? The intersubjective understanding of forgiveness encourages us to critically reflect upon the decision of forgiveness post-atrocity. I contend that reflection allows us to configure a

space for a more ethical and less rancorous engagement with the possibility of forgiveness.

Creating new spaces requires a radical shift in thought. Without such a shift, critical examination of conventional forgiveness remains stifled by relatively hegemonic and mundane agendas and concerns. In Chapter Two, I will be rereading conventional forgiveness through a lens of deconstruction in order to challenge several underlying assumptions. Deconstruction, as an ongoing project, seeks to remind "the powers-that-be of their finitude," thereby questioning the authority of concepts and institutions that claim universal status (Smith 2005, 66). Overall, my project seeks to remind us that even the most customary and ubiquitous scenes of 'forgiveness' are finite and imperfect. Challenging the apparently universal status of forgiveness is important because it makes theoretical and practical spaces from which to explore less privileged accounts of forgiveness. This chapter will explore several alternative facets of forgiveness currently subverted by more mainstream understandings, in order to show, for example, that what is often considered unforgivable is, at least in theory, forgivable. Alternative conceptualizations of forgiveness are explored in an attempt to open up considerations for a wider range of responses to the unforgivable. It is also in this chapter that I illustrate how our ability to respond differently to unwanted togetherness means incorporating alternative views of forgiveness into our current understanding. Taken as a whole, Chapter Two aims at exposing alternative interpretations of forgiveness in hopes of challenging more hegemonic attachments to forgiveness, attachments that appear to foreclose its possibility.

In addition to offering a deconstructed mapping of forgiveness, in Chapter Three I offer an innovative reworking of the value of forgiveness as an action and idea. The value of forgiveness, as I see it, is cashed out through the intersubjective capacities we gain from either thinking about or experiencing forgiveness *as a negotiation between conventional and more radical understandings*. Here I am interested in the capacities we develop by reflecting on decisions of forgiveness at intrapsychic, interpersonal and social levels that make forgiveness a valuable venture. The emphasis on these capacities shifts the encounter with forgiveness from attaining it (as with the conventional version) to the ways in which we are changed by moments of decision about forgiveness—by the ethical encounter with unethical acts.

In all of this, I hope to offer some critical insight into how we respond to each other in the aftermath of unbearable violations of social norms, challenging what we currently acknowledge as acceptable degrees of resentment. While we cannot realistically aim to end all evil by way of forgiveness, with enough courage and self-awareness, we can allay the vicious cycle of hatred and reprisal that such violence provokes.

CHAPTER ONE:
An Overview of Conventional and Intersubjective Understandings of Forgiveness

Jacques Derrida is curious about and critical of the recent worldwide adoption of discourses of forgiveness in response to all things evil. Part of Derrida's concern is that, on the one hand, "forgiveness dominates the whole [worldwide] scene, and on the other hand, it has become hollow, void, attenuated" (in Kearney 2001, 54). Yet despite Derrida's claim that forgiveness has lost its force, many others (psychologists, politicians, sociologists social workers and some philosophers) promote it as a pragmatic way to deal with various traumas.

Heeding Derrida's concern, this chapter will work to clarify the conditions of forgiveness. Given that diverging interpretations and understandings of forgiveness exist, I will first describe some general and non-controversial conditions that must hold in order for forgiveness to be an appropriate or even a relevant consideration. Second, I will describe a particular yet ubiquitous understanding of forgiveness privileged in many developed societies, regardless of religious heritages. Within the domain of these *conventional understandings* the value of forgiveness is already assumed, and so the questions centre around what actions are forgivable. Third, I will highlight some key features of an intersubjective understanding of forgiveness.[6] This realm, as a whole, conceives of forgiveness as a way to overcome one's resentment of and desires for vengeance against the wrongdoer; the account of forgiveness that I will defend falls within this intersubjective field. *Intersubjective understandings* pose a direct challenge to conventional understandings that leave the question of the self out of the picture of forgiveness.

Some General Conditions of Forgiveness

Some philosophers contend forgiveness is a virtue, while others understand it as an emotion, a speech act or an action (R.S. Downie 1965; McGary1989; Hegel 1967; and Arendt 1998, respectively). All agree that a necessary but not sufficient condition for forgiveness is the existence of an offence: "fault constitutes the occasion for forgiveness" (Ricoeur, 2004, 457).

In addition to the existence of an offence, the injured party must acknowledge the offence to some extent. Enright concedes the difficulty of such acknowledgement in cases involving traumatic experiences. While the injured person may be immediately aware of the scope of harm, the realization of the depth of psychological harm inflicted may remain hindered while in an 'uncovering phase'. Within this phase, arising in the aftermath of the trauma, a person may be unable to perceive the moral and psychological significance of the harm (Enright et al. 1998, 52). The very ability to admit to the devastation suffered is hindered by the magnitude of the trauma. Arthur W. Frank speaks to the difficulty of admitting one's pain and grief: "Many if not most North Americans share a cultural reluctance to say that their lives have gone badly in some significant respect and to mourn the loss of what was desired but will never happen. Our contemporary version of stoicism borders on denial" (Frank, 1997, 65). In spite of this difficulty, Molly Andrews, following Garton Ash, insists that both knowledge and acknowledgment of harm are prerequisites for forgiveness; harm per se is not a sufficient condition (1999, 108).

Most theorists believe that, beyond the awareness of harm, scenes of forgiveness must also carry an element of blame. Ricoeur sees forgiveness

as a place where "moral accusation is bared... that place where agents bind themselves to their action and recognize themselves as accountable" (2004, 458). The offence must be intentional and the offender must acknowledge him or herself as guilty, for it would seem unreasonable and even inappropriate to forgive someone for an act they were not responsible for. As McGary points out, "in the western tradition, one must be accountable or responsible for faulty behaviour in order to be held blameworthy" (1989, 346). This condition of culpability bars accidents and other scenarios where harm occurs, but is not caused by an 'intentional being'.[7] Forgiveness entails an intentional offence inflicted upon one moral agent by another.[8]

Conventional Understandings of Forgiveness

This section works to demonstrate the ways a conventional reading—privileged for its pragmatic value—shapes our understanding of forgiveness. I will hint at how the therapeutic, reconciliatory and retributive power of conventional forgiveness, while integral in many cases to individual psychological health and political goodwill, seems inadequate in cases of interpersonal relations involving the kind of unwanted togetherness exemplified in the case of Karla Teale.

Forgiveness is popularly defined as a reparative tool used to mend interpersonal and social wounds, and this focus on the social function of forgiveness makes it *conditional*. The questions that arise from thinking about forgiveness in this way might be: What steps must be taken in order to reach forgiveness? How do we overcome resentment in order to return to the relationship that existed before the violation? This conventional version of forgiveness is conditional because it offers itself *only on the condition* that the wrongdoer apologizes, confesses, and transforms his moral attitudes.

While this is not a problem for most, the requirement of apology in exchange for forgiveness is arguably a very weak interpretation of the moral conditions necessary for any attempt of forgiveness; it focuses on what is required of the wrongdoer and neglects what is demanded of us morally and psychologically in order to forgive.

The conventional understanding is teleological: its various requirements lead towards a desired end. Forgiveness in this context often requires that the wrongdoer repent and transform from the person she was at the time of the wrongdoing. This view assumes that forgiveness is desirable in cases where the harm is forgivable, an apology is offered, and reconciliation can be attempted. The conventional view indexes forgiveness to the gravity of the offense and the contrition of the offender; it is about judging proportionality. Forgiveness needs to take seriously the fault of the offender, and whether the original violence was justified. By default, forgiveness is undesirable and unwarranted in cases where the apology is absent or the harm is too great. One result is that forgiving atrocities is rendered impossible. And yet, people do—astonishingly—forgive heinous crimes they themselves have endured. This exceptional capacity to forgive the unforgivable seems, however, to contradict the teleological character of forgiveness because one forgives what cannot be atoned for. These exceptional cases of forgiveness at the same time highlight the 'normalcy' of conventional forgiveness by virtue of being abnormal cases. This exceptional variety of forgiveness will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Two.

The conventional understanding of forgiveness most often generates indignation in cases involving difficult and unwanted togetherness. The St.

Catherine's community as well as the greater Canadian public appear to have no interest in reconciling relations with Karla Teale; not only was she a stranger to most of the people whose lives her actions affected, but her actions encroached the limits of what is considered forgivable. Furthermore, part of the reasoning behind the public's unwillingness to allow Teale to reintegrate into the community is that many people believed that Teale had been let off too easily with her plea bargain sentence.[9] Upon Karla Teale's release, she did a live interview with CBC Radio-Canada. The interview was done entirely in French, (Teale learned to speak French while incarcerated). The interviewer at one point asked if Homolka had 'paid for her crimes'. Teale replied that *legally* she had, but not yet *socially and emotionally.*[10] I find Teale's response both honest and insightful. The social and emotional payments are yet to come; they will be served in society, in public. Teale's account seems to illustrate how unfettered resentment translates social judgment. Accordingly, the legal system often upholds what Derrida calls the public's sense of an "eternal right to judge" unforgivable crimes (in Kearney 2001, 55). Aware of the public's retributive attitudes, Karla Teale decided to start over in Quebec, as opposed to Ontario where she claimed the media had portrayed her so negatively that the Quebecois, in contrast, seemed less likely to judge. This anecdote illustrates that our attachments to justice and punishment a) make some actions and/or people unforgivable, and b) treat our self-righteous judging as unproblematic.

Judgment, within conventional understandings of inter-personal forgiveness, establishes a boundary between the identities of the 'perpetrator' and 'injured party,' first, by the obvious fact that they are different persons (we are not talking about self-forgiveness or forgiveness

from God), and second, by assigning guilt to the perpetrator and by (often but not always) assuming the innocence to the injured party. Because it is the injured party's prerogative to decide whether to forgive (c.f. Trudy Govier 2002), it seems then, that she or he, by acting as the judge in the case of the other's forgivability, claims moral authority. This positioning not only solidifies the boundary between the two, but also hierarchically orders the two into superior and subordinate positions, accentuating the moral superiority of the 'victim' or injured party over the guilty perpetrator.

In everyday understandings, it seems as though forgiveness acts as a kind of alternative to punishment. When forgiveness appears to be deserved, it can be given, but when a person is said to be undeserving, forgiveness is withheld in order to punish. Implicit in this understanding of forgiveness is a strong sense of retribution. As such, forgiveness gets implemented as a tool to achieve justice, rather than to overcome one's sense of vengeance. Public resentment towards Teale fails to give thought or reflection to the real concern: how the brutal deaths of these two girls affected the public's sense of morality. Resentment focuses instead on social judgment of the guilty. Within the conventional realm of forgiveness, I contend that resentment goes unchecked and unchallenged, and that unfettered resentment manifests as ongoing hatred and vengeance.

Intersubjective Understandings of Forgiveness

In contrast to the conventional understandings of forgiveness as an exchange for contrition, intersubjective understandings of forgiveness treat it as a way to let go of one's resentment towards the wrongdoer. According to Howard McGary (1989), intentionally ending resentment is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition of forgiveness. Intersubjective accounts of forgiveness

explore how the other's actions disturb the self, and how the self in turn responds—they explore a dialectic of resentment between the self and other. This exploration does not necessarily assume in advance how the engagement will turn out. I support this interpretation of forgiveness as a process that involves acknowledging and examining one's sense of resentment and desires for vengeance, and evaluating to what degree these sentiments are justified.

Within the intersubjective domain of forgiveness, Claudia Card maintains, "people can forgive at least what they can resent" (2002, 175). Whereas in the conventional view, people often do not feel they can forgive what they resent, Card is suggesting that resentment is a condition of possibility for forgiveness. Paul Newberry, referring to Joseph Butler's sermons on forgiveness written nearly three hundred years ago, says resentment is the instinctive result of hurt or violence (2001, 234). Between the harm inflicted and the possibility for forgiveness, there is a seemingly natural element of resentment.

Within the intersubjective view of forgiveness, one's sense of resentment is informed by self-respect. Jeffrie Murphy contends that "a person who does not resent moral injuries done to him…is almost necessarily a person lacking self-respect" (1988, 16). Martha Minow takes this contention a step further, arguing that desires for retribution or vengeance denote one's self-respect (1998, 10).[11] Minow says although the word vengeance sounds pejorative, "it embodies important ingredients of moral response to wrongdoing" (1998, 10). In fact, Howard McGary says, "morality, for its maintenance, requires that we sometimes feel anger, resentment and wrath" (1989, 346). Self-respect indicates personal standards

of dignity and self-worth. According to Jean Hampton, self-respect also fuels the core ideal underlying retribution: equal dignity to all persons (in Minow, 1998, 12). In addition to "[holding] the perpetrators' deeds against them," condemnation upholds one's self-respect, and the dignity of all persons more generally (Card, 2002, 176). Referring to Hampton, Minow says "through retribution, the community corrects the wrongdoer's false message that the victim was less worthy of value that the wrongdoer" (1998, 12). Retribution, in the sense being employed here, signals a kind of "vengeance curbed by the intervention of someone other than the victim and by principles of proportionality and individual rights" (Minow 1998, 12). Here we see a particular sense wherein retribution functions as a way to satisfy the victim's sense of justice, honour self-respect and the moral code more generally. Within the domain of intersubjective understandings of forgiveness, focusing on one's own sense of self-respect makes condemnation a project that begins with the self; we reflect on how the other's harm has infringed upon our sense of self.

But Hannah Arendt warns us of the narcissism that plagues efforts to judge one's relationships to others exclusively from what she calls "Platonic rulership," whereby "right and wrongs of relationships with others are determined by attitudes toward one's self" (1998, 238). Arendt contends that forgiveness is informed by a moral code made up of experiences no one could have with him/herself: experiences that "are entirely based on the presence of others" (1998, 238). Forgiveness puts us in relation with an other, and it is here that the element of risk enters the scene of forgiveness. As Jankélévitch points out, "forgiveness, … is a not a monologue but a dialogue; forgiveness, being a relation of two, entails a supplementary

hazard: this adventurous element stems from the presence of the other" (2005, 151). Arendt supports this view:

> Both [forgiving and promising] depend on plurality, on the presence and acting of others, for no one can forgive himself [sic] and no one can feel bound by a promise made only to himself; forgiving and promising enacted in solitude or isolation remain without reality and can signify no more than a role played before one's self. (1998, 237)

According to this view, it is in the presence of both parties that forgiveness finds its space.

These views of plurality add to, rather than conflict with, the more self-reflective views presented by Minow. Both views support the overarching appeal of intersubjective understandings of forgiveness: their dialectical character. Both acknowledge the back and forth involved in consideration of resentment and forgiveness; it entails self-reflection and other-regard. This focus shifts the act of condemnation from being strictly about the negative judgment of other selves (which is how it tends to operate within conventional understandings of forgiveness). Reckoning with one's resentment involves dialectical regard for one's self and other selves.

In cases involving trauma, the damage to one's sense of self-worth, and, correspondingly, one's sense of retribution are intensified. As Card points out, "evils leave us speechless, appalled, horrified, nauseated. When we do not find speech, atrocities evoke rage and condemnation" (2002, 176). Central to intersubjective understandings of forgiveness is the belief that feelings of condemnation, resentment and retribution are triggered by harm and shaped by values of self-respect. Within this intersubjective model, attention is paid to how such feelings are informed by how we feel

about our selves and others (guided by self-worth and dignity) in addition to being informed by societal norms that push towards judgment of others.[12]

There are two ways that resentment is problematized within the realm of intersubjective forgiveness. One way is by challenging whether resentment is always justified. Amongst the wide-ranging literature on the value of resentment, Butler's work maintains an important distinction between morally justified and unjustified forms. Paul Newberry, referring to Butler's work, explains that deliberate resentment "is properly (and again, naturally) directed towards those who have been 'in a moral sense injurious either to ourselves or others'" (2001, 235). Deliberate resentment is morally justified when it serves to protect oneself against further moral injury. This form contrasts to sudden forms of resentment that give no thought to "the real demerit or fault of him who suffers that violence" (Newberry 2001, 234). Reactionary resentment remains unjustified. While I would not commit to saying that morally justified forms of resentment are absent from public responses to atrocities, I believe it is often the less reflective and more reactionary forms of resentment that shape how most Canadians respond to Karla Teale. It may be that the public, or many individuals, are simply irresponsible when it comes to deciding whether to forgive, and this is not simply because they espouse the conventional view I defined in Chapter One. Nonetheless, the intersubjective view is able to critically examine such behaviour and offer novel ways to rethink forgiveness in ways that the conventional understanding cannot.

Another way that resentment becomes problematized is by challenging the limit of justified resentment. Robert D. Enright insists that the goal of confronting our resentment is to release it rather than harbor it

(1998, 53). Furthermore, McGary maintains that it is in fact morally unjustifiable to hang onto resentment that goes beyond appropriate limits (1989, 343). As Butler notes, the spirit of resentment is to cause harm to the wrongdoer: ultimately, "resentment often seems to cause more harm than it prevents" (in Newberry 2001, 235). Resentment that leads to further harm encapsulates the desire for revenge or retribution. There is an added element of pleasure within the consuming experience of resentment: we often choose to gratify this desire in the hopes of satisfying it. But, as Minow points out, attempts to satisfy resentment with revenge are in vain: in addition to perpetuating a cycle of violence, "giving in to emotions that circle revenge and retribution can be self-defeating and illusionary" (Minow 1998, 13). Butler's strict view of the limit of resentment creates the following tension between resentment and revenge: resentment that "goes beyond protection… is unjustifiable because it does not fulfill the purpose for which the emotion of resentment exists, namely, to protect against injury" (in Newberry 2001, 236). According to Butler, revenge is always an unjustified abuse of resentment. Consequently, desires of vengeance must be somehow kept in check; forgiveness is one way to do this.

Forgiveness, within intersubjective understandings, is sought and valued for its capacity to end the cycle of hatred and revenge. However, it is not enough to simply give up one's resentment. Forgiveness entails work on the self: it explores how resentment is informed by values of self-respect while problematizing desires for vengeance. The strength of forgiveness arises in part from what Jankélévitch describes as the "revolutionary inversion of our vindictive tendencies" (2005, 153). The following chapter offers a radicalized understanding of forgiveness in order to further

challenge the tendency to judge and offer an alternative account of what forgiveness in fact calls on us do in the face of unwanted togetherness.

CHAPTER TWO:
Deconstructed Interpretations: Negotiating the Impossibility of Forgiveness

Whereas intersubjective understandings of forgiveness deal with the work of overcoming resentment and challenging desires for retribution within the self, conventional understandings—guided by retributive inclinations—index to the other person. Conventional forgiveness, dependent upon the apparent forgivability of the wrongdoer, forestalls considerations of forgiveness in cases where the crime is especially heinous. Having situated my work within the intersubjective view, however, I will now explore a radicalized understanding of intersubjective forgiveness.

The aim of this chapter is to demonstrate how a more radicalized understanding of forgiveness is able to respond to and reckon with unwanted togetherness (including but not limited to Karla Teale's case). In order to demonstrate this, I begin by briefly spelling out the project of deconstruction in relation to forgiveness. From there, I demonstrate three points: 1) How the project of deconstruction moves decisively away from models of exchange and retribution; this creates the possibility of forgiving even the unforgivable. 2) Deconstruction exposes an alternative logic of forgiveness as both unconditional and undeserved, and it is given despite the wrongdoer's 'unforgivability'. This logic operates against the conditional logic of conventional understandings of forgiveness; however neither logic is realizable in its 'pure' form. 3) A deconstructed view of forgiveness maintains that responding ethically to unwanted togetherness involves a negotiation between conditional and unconditional logics of forgiveness, which creates a space from which to make an authentic decision. I will conclude by offering some provisional but substantive qualities of this space

of negotiation in order to gain some footing from which to reflect upon the kinds of selves that are to engage in such decisions.

In what follows, I rely on the insights of both Derrida and Jankélévitch and their deconstructive interpretations of forgiveness. Both philosophers acknowledge the haunting elements of loss that linger in the aftermath of atrocities, and the consequent difficulty of trying to reckon ethically with the pain and hatred that fuels our inability to forgive. It is here that we shift away from the practical questions raised in Chapter One, in order to encounter more theoretical ones. With retributive and reconciliatory inclinations of conventional understandings newly exposed, the question of forgiveness stops being about 'how to attain it' or 'who deserves it,' and starts being more about 'what aspects of and possibilities for forgiveness do we overlook when we adhere to conventional understandings?' Once we open up a space from which to discuss this question, we can then shift to more psychological and ethical discussions about the demands that are made on our selves when we attempt to negotiate between conventional and radical forms of forgiveness. In Chapter Three, I will propose the value of thinking about forgiveness, regardless of whether we are actually able to forgive. For now, I will confine my exploration to the deconstruction of forgiveness and its implications.

A Brief Overview of The Project of Deconstruction

Before exploring the various facets of forgiveness left concealed within the popular understanding, I will explain three things about deconstruction and its implications for our understanding of forgiveness. John Caputo offers us an insightful and, most importantly, accessible look into the workings of deconstruction. The mission of deconstruction, as he puts it, "is to show that

things—texts, institutions, traditions, societies, beliefs, and practices of whatever size or sort you need—do not have definable meanings and determinable missions, [...] that they exceed the boundaries they currently occupy" (1997, 31). Here we have the first point: Deconstruction, in relation to forgiveness, acts as a kind of reminder; the meaning we prescribe to forgiveness never fully captures the experience. The fact that we cannot ever capture determinable meanings is exemplified in Derrida's account of *différance,* intoning both *difference* and *deferral*. That is, whenever we try to define meanings, to pin them down, we must defer to other words and meanings in order to describe and differentiate them. George Pavlich, applying Derrida's approach to the notion of forgiveness, claims that it is not a fixed entity; forgiveness actually resists stable definition (2005, 108). According to the account of *différance*, then, there is no meaning intrinsic to concepts such as forgiveness; only privileged understandings that overshadow other interpretations. Therefore, the words we defer to play an integral role in shaping how and what we think about forgiveness.

Granting this interpretation, my second point arises; namely, that the conventional understanding of forgiveness has only circumstantial or socially constructed significance. It should be clear that I am not denying the influence or significance of socially constructed values; rather, I am pointing out their lack of universal status even though they stand as ubiquitous. The language surrounding and delineating current discussions of forgiveness is dominated by an overarching desire for punishment. Deconstruction challenges this understanding.

This brings me to my third point concerning the relevance of a deconstructive view. Deconstruction exposes the finitude of the

understandings we often think are universal (e.g. the conventional logic of forgiveness), thus it is able to create valid—even if marginal—spaces for a hermeneutics of forgiveness. Deconstruction enables spaces of thought from which to consider more radical interpretations of forgiveness that subsequently challenge deeply rooted inclinations to incessantly hate and resent. Therefore, deconstruction appears to be an appropriate and fruitful place from which to rethink and reexamine the complex possibility of forgiveness in cases involving people like Karla Teale.

Challenging Exchange and Retribution

Derridean forgiveness remains committed to dismantling the relationship between forgiveness and punishment; by placing the event of forgiveness beyond the limited and predetermined exchange of punishment and forgiveness, it appears that forgiveness does not end with what cannot be punished. The Derridean story marks the beginning of forgiveness precisely with the unforgivable. This does not mean, however, that the wrong cannot also be judged; Teale's experience of paying the legal price is distinct from paying the social and moral prices. Moreover, the fact that many believe that she was not punished enough, or that the punishment could never fit the magnitude of the harm and hurt it caused, does not then make her or her actions necessarily unforgivable. Deconstruction is careful to distinguish issues of justice from issues of forgiveness (both Derrida and Jankélévitch see these two as separate but connected realms). Therefore, forgiveness 'deconstructed' offers a novel perspective not only on the value of forgiveness, but also points to the wellspring of its possibility. What is unforgivable does not hinder forgiveness but rather fuels its possibility.

Contrary to the popular belief that justice and forgiveness operate in tandem, there are competing views that work to demonstrate the illegitimate marriage between justice and forgiveness. Speaking out against this tendency to mix justice and forgiveness into the same equation, Enright et al. claim that because "forgiveness is a personal response to one's own injury…we can forgive and still bring legal justice to bear as required by the situation" (Enright 1998, 49). To offer a local example, The Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies assists *any* female offender who seeks its help; "Our interest is in having people join mainstream society".[13] This attitude towards wrongdoers marks a stark contrast to the public's resentment towards Teale. The Elizabeth Fry Society does not undermine the legal system's push for justice, but does advocate for humane treatment of incarcerated women as well as challenge the public's perception of offenders.[14] The Elizabeth Fry Society, in spite of the social condemnation of and resentment towards Teale, offers her compassion nonetheless. As Jankélévitch contends, "the one forgiving has need of all his courage in order to sacrifice not a part of his possessions but his being itself, and even more to brave the social taboos, to challenge the duty to punish, and to support himself in so-called moral dilemmas" (2005, 128). Challenging our self-righteous desire to punish calls for a reconfiguration of experience of forgiveness.

Contrary to Jankélévitch's earlier reactionary contention that 'forgiveness died in the death camps,' the 2005 translation *Forgiveness* gives a more radical account of the possibility of forgiveness. He says "forgiveness is rendered pathetically possible by the very antithesis that prevents it" (128). In other words, it is precisely because we have

experienced and continue to face the unforgivable that forgiveness finds its force (even if this is the very place where forgiveness seems to lose its meaning). Forgiveness is forced into action precisely where it appears impossible. Put in more concrete terms, it is the rape and murder of Leslie Mahaffy and Kristen French, and the subsequent hatred towards Karla Homolka, that make forgiveness an option. And the operative word here is 'option,' for the existence of an offence, as I mentioned in Chapter One, is not a sufficient condition for forgiveness. Jankélévitch is careful to make this distinction: "sin is not the cause of forgiveness. Sin is rather the material for it" (2005, 129). *Forgiveness* concludes with the pronouncement that forgiveness is made precisely for the hopeless and incurable cases (Jankélévitch 2005, 156). It is here that we are able to see deconstruction's first major departure from conventional thought.

Conflicting Logics of Forgiveness: Derrida's Aporia

Derrida's work poses a direct challenge to our hegemonic understandings of both the value and the role of forgiveness. He is able to obscure the 'truth' of conventional forgiveness by exposing another logic that plays a compelling yet subordinate role in our understanding of forgiveness. Derrida does not propose replacing conventional understandings with the alternative logic; he maintains that challenging hegemonic privileging of conventional forgiveness requires *a negotiation between the two.* In order to better understand the two logics that compel Derrida's aporetic notion of forgiveness, I quote Derrida at length:

> Two contradictory logics are in dispute in this [Judeo-Christian-Islamic] heritage. The one that is prevalent imposes a condition: forgiveness has no sense except when the criminal asks for

> forgiveness. The guilty party recognizes his fault; he is already on the path to repentance and self-transformation. This is a pardon *on condition.*
>
> The second logic, also present but less represented [...] is that of a gracious and unconditional forgiveness: I forgive regardless of the attitude of the guilty party, even if he does not ask for forgiveness, even if he does not repent. I forgive him *as* someone who's guilty, presently, actually guilty; I forgive him *insofar as* he (or she) is guilty, or even insofar as he (or she) remains guilty. These two logics compete with and contradict each other, but both of them are active in the discourse of our heritage. (Derrida in Roudinesco 2004, 161)

The first logic, called *conditional forgiveness*, is precisely the logic that dominates our conventional understanding of forgiveness. According to this logic, forgiveness depends upon the presence of a repentant wrongdoer who is both able and willing to transform her moral attitudes. This encapsulates a major component of conventional forgiveness; that it be given only in exchange for an apology. Conditional forgiveness, forgiveness granted in return for something else, follows a logic (the predominant logic of calculation, of tit-for-tat) that continues to correlate forgiveness to a judgment, and as a counterpart to punishment. Derrida claims that Jankélévitch's early work understands forgiveness as something that "can be granted only if the guilty party mortifies himself, confesses himself, repents, accuses himself by asking for forgiveness" (2001, 28). This logic explicitly assumes that repentance and transformation are sufficient in order to forgive, thereby implying that the wrong is already forgivable. By imposing this condition, forgiveness appears attainable. The wrongdoer musters

sufficient contrition and a change in her actions and attitudes in exchange for forgiveness. While it appears that such forgiveness is practically attainable (assuming the wrongdoer is able to meet the demands of the forgiver), some people's actions fall outside of the social realm of what is forgivable. Conditional forgiveness is dependent on not only the repentant wrongdoer, but also the forgivability of the person or act.

Yet Derrida suggests that conditional forgiveness logically entails an *aporia* (an impasse resulting in two plausible but inconsistent assumptions). Giving forgiveness only *on the condition that* the forgiver receives contrition involves a kind of exchange that necessarily entails an obligation for the person who is *receiving* forgiveness. The aporetic result of forgiveness is illustrated with an analogy to the gift. Caputo asks us to suppose that A gives B to C. C is then grateful and now owes A a gift of gratitude. The result is that C, instead of having been given something, is now indebted. In terms of conditional forgiveness, it appears that if C accepts A's gift of forgiveness, C then becomes indebted to A, thereby having come into debt through the acquisition of forgiveness. Within this logic, there appears to be no space from which to give, because each attempt results in the giver actually gaining something. Instead, forgiveness becomes an exchange fuelled by obligation. Ernesto Verdeja describes the difficulty that arise from forgiving conditionally, he says,

> the difficulty with conditional forgiveness is [...] that conditions impose an existential *burden* on the perpetrator, in effect making forgiveness contingent on an element of exteriority – transformation, repentance, or any other condition,... (2004, 27)

Caputo contends that this aporetic result arises each time we attempt to give forgiveness (1997b, 41).

Contrary to the privileged logic of conventional forgiveness, deconstruction reveals an alternative logic of the *unconditional*—absolute or pure grace. The notion of 'pure' forgiveness is rooted in a kind of religious idealization. Historically, such forgiveness is understood as a gracious gift from God. Such forgiveness belongs to a religious heritage that Derrida calls 'Abrahamic', in bringing together Christianity, Judaism, and Islam (2005, 28). According to this heritage, there is a demand for "the *unconditional*, gracious, infinite, aneconomic forgiveness granted *to the guilty as guilty*" (Derrida 2005, 34). Referring to the religious beginnings of forgiveness, Max Scheler reminds us that Jesus does not say, "if you promise to sin no more, I will forgive you" (in Jankélévitch 2005, 147). Jesus forgives *first*. Jankélévitch says, "in order to forgive, forgiveness itself did not set conditions, did not have reservations, required neither promises nor guarantees!" (2005, 147). Unconditional forgiveness happens in the absence of contrition, excuses, and promises. Forgiveness is thus idealized as an unconditional, albeit undeserved, gift that gives without return, and regardless of the wrongdoer's guilt and moral attitude. Derrida believes that the unconditional logic calls for forgiveness to be given only when the wrongdoer has *not* confessed, repented or improved. Only then can forgiveness be said to ask for nothing in return or in advance; it exists outside the realm of exchange.

Moreover, unconditional forgiveness makes no judgment about the forgivability of the wrongdoer. The unconditional character of forgiveness is analogous to the act of love, for as Jankélévitch points out, "it is love that

renders what it loves lovable," just as it is forgiveness that renders what it forgives forgivable (Jankélévitch 2005, 147). Unconditional forgiveness is not motivated by the apparent forgivability of the wrongdoer. But if such forgiveness is given despite the culpability of the wrongdoer, what motivates it?

Caputo describes a desire to give an unfettered gift. He says, "*Il faut*, there is a need, a desire, a dream to give donatively, not dutifully, out of love, not from a sense of debt. We do not dream of debts but of gifts; debts are matters for nightmares, not dreams" (Caputo 1999, 214). The only calculation that forgiveness allows, according to the New Testament, is that "one should forgive seven times a day, and seventy times seven, that is to say, innumerably, countlessly, incalculably" (Caputo 1999, 215). The dream of forgiveness might be better understood as the fantasy of pure forgiveness; it remains on the horizon of possibility as an idealization rather than an attainable situation.[15] Caputo believes that it is the impossibility that nourishes and feeds the desire: "that drives us on, drives us mad, like the secret, which engenders endless interpretations" (Caputo 1997a, 170).

Construed in its pure form, unconditional forgiveness is always and already in conflict with the conventional conditional logic. Pure, unconditional grace, then, is forever being corrupted by the calculations and conditions of conventional forgiveness. There are two prevailing instances where the unconditional forgiveness is subverted. First is the occasion where forgiveness is given *in order to* attain some other end. This is usually a scene of reconciliation. Second is the instance where forgiveness is given *on the condition that* some other demand is met. Derrida and Jankélévitch

discuss both of these instances in order to distinguish pure forms of forgiveness from other conditional forms of excuse, repair and resolution.

Unconditional forgiveness is corrupted when done towards reconciliatory and therapeutics ends. Unconditional forgiveness contradicts the claim that forgiveness can be implemented or used as a tool to mend past relations. In the words of Derrida, scenes of forgiveness aimed at mending past relations "will not be authentic forgivenesses, but symptoms of … a therapy of forgetting, of healing away, of the passage of time; in short, a sort of narcissism, reparation and self-reparation, a healing that re-narcissizes" (Derrida 2001, 41). The interested character of calculated transactions between forgiver and forgiven is also especially palpable in the case of political reconciliation. As Smith aptly points out, forgiveness in the service of political reconciliation or normalization "is always *interested*. If, for instance, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa sought to create a space for forgiveness *in order to* achieve reconciliation, then according to Derrida, this would not be authentic or pure forgiveness" (2005, 71). Exchanging forgiveness in order to attain something over and above forgiveness (e.g., political camaraderie), cancels out its unconditional quality.

Pure forgiveness is impossible because enacting it would require the absence of exchange; pure forgiveness assumes a place outside economies. If unconditional forgiveness did occur, it would be a kind of miracle. Pure forgiveness as a concept is both theoretically and practically unrealizable, yet its idealized form colors the horizon of possibility; it is the unattainable, pure form that drives us to keep thinking about how we might experience such forgiveness in some constrained, finite, particular way. As Smith points

out, "for Derrida, this (essential) opposition between the unconditional ideal and the conditions of reality, does not issue in either complacency or despair; rather, he finds in this disparity a call and a challenge…" (2005, 70) It is precisely where forgiveness appears impossible that its possibility manifests.

Derrida's account of the contradictory yet indissociable logics of forgiveness creates an unusual result. Namely, that each logic is corrupted by the other, and as a result, each logic remains impossible. Here we see the interplay of the conditional and unconditional logics. When I attempt to give unconditionally, the purity of forgiveness is corrupted by the realization the wrongdoer becomes indebted to me as soon as I give the undeserved gift. If I give forgiveness conditionally, the wrongdoer is indebted to me because she is required to transform to meet the demands of my forgiveness. In this case, rather than giving a gift, I am demanding one. It appears, then, that neither logic can ever truly be realized. While it is perhaps easy to see why forgiveness can never be fully disinterested, it is also true that forgiveness can never be completely interested, either. Conditional forgiveness is not informed or motivated exclusively by reconciliation or repentance. Rather, forgiveness remains rooted (however loosely) in its religious heritage. Despite the conventional understanding's overshadowing of the alternative logic of absolute grace, there remains the constant interplay between both logics.

A Space for Forgiveness: Negotiation and Decision

The possibility of forgiveness, according to the radicalized view of deconstruction, involves the dialectic between self and other advocated by Minow and Arendt in Chapter One. The possibility also entails, however, as

we have just seen, the negotiation between conditional and unconditional logics of forgiveness. This is precisely where the real and messy negotiations of forgiveness take on a more ethical shape.

For deconstruction, a definitive moment for any negotiation is the presence of a decision. Derrida contends, moreover, that in order that we be able to make an 'authentic' decision, we must first reach a state of undecidability. This is not, as many critics mistakenly understand it, a state of apathy or the inability to act; it is rather the condition of possibility for deciding, which is contingent on being caught off-guard by one's indecision (Caputo, 1997b, 137). Deconstruction does not deny the practical advantages of choosing with the help of one's inclinations, agendas, and social norms. It does however contend that if and when a decision is really a decision, "it is more than a programmable, deducible, calculable, computable result from a logarithm" (Caputo 1997b, 137). When we allow ourselves to reach a point of undecidability, our choices stop being programmed responses that complement the hegemonic values, and we begin acting anew.

Undecidability calls on me to face each dilemma as a singular instance for which there is no maxim or predetermined ethical response. The only decision that can be called 'just' is "singular action in a singular situation" (Caputo, 1997b, 138). I should reiterate here that Derrida (or deconstruction) makes no claim about the *kind* of actions authentic decisions produce. Contrary to the teleological nature of conventional forgiveness, authentic decisions about forgiveness do not presuppose a certain outcome, or the value of the outcome. The 'ordeal of undecidability' rejects ethics of algorithm and makes authentic choice the central condition for forgiveness.

Derrida's notion of decision poses a direct challenge to the programmable character of conventional forgiveness.

Absent from Derrida's account of undecidability is a substantive description of how we might actually engage with both logics. What would the experience of forgiveness be like? As Caputo appropriately points out, because Derrida is the kind of philosopher "who thinks that you are really getting somewhere only when there is no plannable, programmable way to proceed, there is a fitting irony in supplying a map, ... which is like giving the Cartesian coordinates of the Promised Land" (1997a, xxvii). In fact, Derrida warns us that "you cannot do a phenomenology of the aporia [because]... an aporia is an experience, enduring experience, in which nothing... presents itself as such" (in Kearney 2001, 62). Acknowledging both Derrida's caveat and the dissatisfaction that might be felt about my silence so far surrounding the actual experience of forgiveness, I will offer a provisional account of how it might feel to encounter the negotiation and subsequent ordeal of undecidability.

Part of Derrida's examination of forgiveness included the study of several letters exchanged between a young German and Jankélévitch (a French Jew), following the publication of Jankélévitch's (1971) *L'imprecriptable*, a book that chastised Germans for their 'clear consciences' nearly forty years after the end of the Jewish Holocaust. Derrida notes that the young German quotes Jankélévitch in the epigraph of his first letter: "They killed six million Jews. But they sleep well. They eat well and the Mark is doing well" (in Derrida 2001, 38). The German goes on to say "I am completely innocent of Nazi crimes; [but] my conscience is not clear, and I feel a mixture of shame, pity, resignation, sadness,

incredulity, revolt. I do not always sleep well" (ibid., 38). Interestingly, the German invited Jankélévitch to visit him. He said, "If ever, dear M. Jankélévitch, you pass through here, knock on our door and come in. You will be welcome. [...] I like the music of Schubert and Schumann. But I will play a record of Chopin, or if you prefer Faure and Debussy" (ibid., 39). Jankélévitch responded in a letter that, Derrida notes, never mentions the word forgiveness. Jankélévitch says, "It is rare for generosity, spontaneity, and a keen sensitivity to find their language in the words we use. [...] Thank you. I will not come to Germany. I will not go that far. [...] But you are young [...] you do not have this uncrossable barrier to cross. When you come to Paris [...] knock on my door. We will sit down at the piano" (in Derrida 2001, 38).

With the brief passages of this encounter in mind and without saying too much here about what this negotiation demands psychologically—that is the project of my next chapter—I can elucidate a few points about the negotiation of forgiveness. First, Derrida concedes the double bind of being torn between the ideal and the empirical. The negotiation entails a seemingly untenable struggle between "a hyperbolic vision of pure forgiveness and the reality of society working at reconciliation" (2005, 72). The structure of this aporia is like a hinge; within it one is caught between two inseparable sides that are, in order to be connected, distinct from each other. Trying to clear a path between the ideal and reality accentuates their inseparability.

And we can see this struggle in the negotiation between the German and Jankélévitch; Jankélévitch thanks the German for his generosity, but refuses the young man's invitation to visit. Gifts to the other are offered ("If

ever you pass through here, … you will be welcome"), but stipulations prevent the exchange from being unconditional ("I will not come to Germany. I will not go that far"). Jankélévitch refuses the German's invitation, but offers one in return. It appears that forgiveness, if and when it happens, is experienced as the back-and-forth between conflicting interests.

The German accepted Jankélévitch's invitation and visited once: "everything took place very cordially but … Jankélévitch always 'systematically avoided' returning to these questions [of forgiveness]" (Derrida 2001, 40). Confronting the 'issues of forgiveness,' however, is not a condition for forgiving: making space for the undecidability that the aporia of forgiveness creates often means loosening the present configurations in order to let something else, something new happen (Caputo 1997a, 171). Listening to music enabled Jankélévitch and the German to go beyond the conventional configurations of forgiveness—resentment, guilt, condemnation and apology—and towards something new.

Jankélévitch wavers back-and-forth between giving and refusing to give: between his loyalties to the conditional logic (waiting for contrition from the Germans) and his desire to ultimately forgive (sharing music with the young German). It is not obvious to me whether he actually reaches the ordeal of undecidability. Jankélévitch maintains that he is too old to cross the uncrossable barrier. An authentic decision, however, "goes eyeball to eyeball with undecidability, stares it in the face (literally), looks into that abyss, and then makes the leap, that is 'gives itself up to the impossible decision'" (Caputo quoting Derrida, 1997b, 137). Jankélévitch does appear to face the abyss, he is aware of the double bind. "The uncrossable to cross," as Derrida points out, causes "two discourses to cross each other, two logics,

[...] which are contradictory, incompatible, irreconcilable" (2001, 40). Jankélévitch welcomes the idea of forgiveness for the future, but makes it known that "this barrier—which will perhaps be crossed by new generations—remains uncrossable to him" (Derrida 2001, 41). In Jankélévitch's wavering between the irreconcilable, we see something that looks like an engagement with forgiveness. Kelly Oliver points out, however, that Derrida's notion of decision is "the result of the precarious and always tenuous reconciliation between the Unconditional and the Conditional" (2003, 283).

A crucial part of negotiating forgiveness is arriving at the ordeal of undecidability. This ordeal may be experienced as feeling no longer grounded. Facing the abyss of indecision and taking the leap of faith can manifest itself as a painful experience of radical instability, vertigo, hopelessness or chaos. The experience of undecidability causes the foundation upon which we stand to shift and crumble. The lack of stability might be experienced simply as loss. Experienced this way, undecidability appears to be an emotionally taxing event.

The chaos that accompanies undecidability is not a state we would ever wish to remain in; however the alternative to undecidability is no better. Frank, speaking of our tendency to turn away from the unpredictable void that surrounds loss, points out that "My objective is hardly to romanticize chaos; it is horrible. But modernity has a hard time accepting, even provisionally, that life sometimes *is* horrible. The attendant denial of chaos only makes its horror worse" (1997, 112). Avoiding chaos can foreclose the opportunity to reckon with loss.

Forgiveness deconstructed shows us that forgiveness happens in a serendipitous, mad way. Alison Rice comments that "sometimes forgiveness eludes reason by taking into account all these impulses, all these aspects that don't have significance in themselves but that possess a 'meaning' that is larger..." (in Kristeva 2002, 286). Forgiveness sometimes defies not only our conventional views of the purpose of forgiveness, but also challenges our attachment to (and the over-valuation of) reason. Caputo describes this moment of giving wherein reason is momentarily forbidden. He says, "...the knight of infinite giving suspends the principle of reason in a moment of madness and gives a gift, affirms the other, unlimitedly" (1999, 214). It is in an instance of suspended reason that our egos risk opening up to other.

Jankélévitch points out that, "forgiveness, in the moment in which it forgives, has to make a violent effort over itself in order to absolve the guilty person instead of condemning him" (2005, 127). In other words, our ability to forgive will entail turning away from the path to which justice leads us (Jankélévitch 2005, 153). Turning one's back on justice, and more generally, on convention, may be a positive experience for some. Rather than being experienced as a loss, undecidability may come about by actively retaliating against norms and obligations that are oppressive.. In this sense, undecidability is the result of letting go of various attachments. The undecidability that accompanies the negotiation of forgiveness may actually be less painful than one's resentful feelings harbored against another. Undecidability can be experienced as a release rather than a loss.

The process and results of the experience of undecidability are always unpredictable; we cannot know in advance whether forgiveness will actually arise or whether the underlying experience of negotiation will be

pleasant, painful, or banal. The experiential aspects of forgiveness do not appear to provide reasons or incentives to attempt forgiveness. They are capricious elements of the experience; they do not define or exemplify the experience of decision, negotiation or forgiveness. The exemplary element of forgiveness is, as Derrida pointed out in Jankélévitch's encounter with the young German, the moment when the two irreconcilable logics meet. While the experience of undecidability is unpredictable, it is not an impossible state to reach. Moreover, it appears that public discourse that incorporate elements of both logics might facilitate the likelihood of reaching this state.

Deconstruction calls on us take a paradoxical stance in order to act ethically. In this chapter I have explored the two logics of forgiveness as seen through the lens of deconstruction, and located a state of undecidability as the site where ethical negotiation of conditional and unconditional logics of forgiveness takes place. It is from this space that we can ethically contemplate and challenge how we currently negotiate forgiveness, and, more generally, how we think about our commitments to ourselves and others.

CHAPTER THREE:
Refiguring Togetherness: Psychological Reflection and Flexibility Evoked through Undecidability

Julia Kristeva, referring to Derrida's deconstructed vision of forgiveness, believes that Derrida's radical position opens an ideal of forgiveness that should not be closed. She also admits, however, that Derrida's vision is "extremely generous, a little utopian, and it presupposes the existence of extremely flexible and evolved individuals, which is unfortunately not the case" (2002, 283). Kristeva argues that ethical considerations of forgiveness—which for Derrida entail a negotiation in the presence of undecidability—are often too difficult. Granting this concern, but keeping in mind the practical possibility of negotiation (undecidability *is not* an impossible state to reach), this chapter explores the various kinds of flexibility presupposed by the ordeal of undecidability.

This chapter is motivated in part by the following questions: What kind of psychological flexibility would it take for us to be able to respond more ethically to others? In the case of Karla Teale, how do the deconstructed insights of Derrida and Jankélévitch inform the messiness of the Canadian public's sentiments of hatred and vengeance towards this stranger? What are the psychological implications of the dialectic for the self?

Thinking of and imagining alternative ways of togetherness produces more unpredictable relationships that disrupt conventional ways of being together. In advocating this, my focus shifts to the ethical demands of decisions concerning forgiveness and away from our understanding of the concept of 'forgiveness.' For, as Robin Schott points out, "instead of focusing on the concept forgiveness, other aspects of moral phenomenology

may [be] more important for both victims and perpetrators: challenging essentialistic group identities for both self and other" (2004, 210). In other words, *the capacities we gain in our engagement with forgiveness*, rather than forgiveness itself, can bring us into contact with innovative ways of rethinking our ethical commitments to ourselves and others when faced with the unethical. I contend that contemplating forgiveness calls on us to make shifts that promote improved (i.e., more honest and less defensive, hateful, and vengeful) relationships intrapsychically, intersubjectively, and socially (with society more generally). I will explore the value of these reflective capacities by drawing upon feminist and social theorists (Susan Brison, Deborah Britzman, Julia Kristeva, and Kelly Oliver) and introduce the normative call of deconstructed forgiveness.

Reflecting upon one's relationship to oneself: Destabilizing one's defensive attachments

Challenging one's conventional beliefs about forgiveness—and responsiveness to others, more generally—entails looking inward and examining one's sense-of-self. Granting that the self is shaped by innumerable influences, I will discuss the influence of our psychological attachments; that is, various conscious and unconscious experiences, thoughts and feelings that we hold onto, and how these attachments help or hinder self-understanding. Internalized feelings and assumptions shape how we feel about ourselves post-trauma, which in turn affects our ability to reach a state of undecidability.

Recalling that the project of deconstruction is a reminder of the privileged yet non-essential character of conventional forgiveness, self-reflection is helpful in a similar way: it challenges essentialist understandings of the self. More specifically, self-reflection can upset

psychological attachments to the idea the self can be intrinsically damaged, corrupted, vulnerable, or, conversely, essentially innocent, safe and invincible. Our psychological attachments demonstrate that our selves are both fragile and resilient, and recognizing this is a stepping-stone towards undecidability. Because the ordeal of undecidability entails a kind of risky venture, wherein one 'looks into that abyss and then makes the leap,' there is an element of courage that facing the ordeal calls for. Courage, in the context of undecidability, might require what Britzman describes as "a willingness to confront one's own discomfort, one's own inadequacy, and the conditions and action that coalesce to foreclose the possibilities of self [as an] ethical [subject]" (2000, 39). Confronting oneself plays an integral role in our ability to reckon with undecidability, and this confrontation requires that we summon the courage to face our attachments and ourselves.

Facing ourselves calls for us to give up some of the defense mechanisms that we depend on to cope with our day-to-day conflicts with others (as well as conflicts characteristic of difficult and unwanted togetherness that provoke intensified hatred and loss). Without first giving up these defenses, the painful psychological experience of trauma can remain obscured and therefore difficult to reckon with. Britzman, referring to the way teachers and students often respond to the *Diary of Anne Frank* and the atrocity of the Jewish Holocaust more generally, points out that

> idealization may be one way to avoid the painful dilemmas of confronting the traumatic residues of this devastating history. But these reactions and their attendant worries, themselves ego defense mechanisms that try to ward off the traumatic perception of helplessness and loss, can foreclose the very process... [of

> considering] how the very questions of vulnerability, despair, and profound loss must become central to our own conceptualizations of who we each are… (2000, 29)

The very mechanisms we hang on to as safeguards from the reality of the loss suffered prevent our attending to how such loss, and the subsequent anger, shapes us. Therefore, in the moment one attempts to face undecidability, one must find a way to keep the ego's defenses at bay long enough to evoke the sheer hopelessness that traumatic experiences and memories trigger.

In order to defend ourselves against the shattering effects that trauma has on the self, we hold beliefs that enable us to dilute the effects of the pain and loss. As Brison points out, the self is largely defined, within metaphysics, as "what ever it is whose persistence accounts for personal identity over time;" there is a commitment to the self as having some kind of continuity (e.g., bodily, psychological, or of memory) (1997, 14). The problem that trauma poses for this view of self as continuity is that traumatic violence upsets this continuity by shattering one's "fundamental assumptions about the world and one's safety in it" (Brison 1997, 14). In response to this disconnection, one's shattered self may attempt to regain control over itself. But underlying these attempts to reconstruct oneself through what Frank (1997) would call "restorative narratives" is an implicit assumption that before the trauma the self was a whole or complete identity.[16] Instead of holding onto the project of the self post-atrocity as an endeavor to reconstruct what was lost or destroyed, new and unpredictable selves *will* emerge. despite efforts to intentionally recreate the self. Being open to the inevitability of new selves that emerge, rather than forcing a

recovery of the old self, we will be better able to cope with reverberations of the trauma that foreclose the opportunity to reflect upon one's attachments.

In order to curb attachments to the self as whole, however, we also need to allow psychological space for contradictory aspects of ourselves. This space might be created by enabling more malleable self-narratives. Kristeva, speaking in psychoanalytic terms, suggests the need for narratives of "free association" that revolt against taboos, ideals and narcissistic limits (2002, 283). Similarly, Frank refers to Roy Schafer's point about the value of flexible self-narratives: "the work of telling her self-story is a process of getting rid of what Schafer calls the 'exaggerated impression of single and unvarying self-entities'" (1997, 67). In other words, our enthusiastic commitment to representations of the self as homogenous prevents us from actually creating more honest self-narratives. Part of 'telling one's story' will involve challenging assumptions about permanence. Schafer's point is confirmed and retold in Kristeva's understanding of the self as an ongoing, unfinished project. She says,

> My conception of forgiveness entails understanding the human being as a subjectivity in permanent creation; we are never finished...Whatever the positive meaning that has been given to you or that you have produced for yourself, it should not be definitive, but rather an opening. It should be a milestone on a continual rebirth. This is a wish, a goal. Nobody gets there; we can't make it there. But it's good to have this as a horizon. (2002, 284)

Selves are not closed entities, but rather unfinished works-in-progress. Therefore, the value we attribute to ourselves shifts. Being aware of these shifts involves examining and loosening internal psychological walls built in

order defend the self against traumatic aspects of one's life that seem to splinter rather than solidify one's narrative.

Critical self-reflection also challenges the tendency to cling to one's innocence after having endured a traumatic experience. Said differently, negotiations around forgiveness do not require or assume one's innocence. And while narratives surrounding violence and loss need to rigorously challenge tendencies towards 'victim blaming,' we should simultaneously challenge the construal of the victim as inherently innocent. Not only is the notion of inherent innocence contentious—Cynthia Ozick contends that "no one is innocent" post-atrocity—but it is also another defense against reckoning with the possibility that we might be obligated to persons considered guilty.[17]

Reckoning with such obligations requires first imagining what these obligations might be. In the case of the Teale, understanding our obligations to the guilty requires a new space; learning new things about our selves creates this space. And learning new things about the self requires moving beyond dichotomies of guilt and innocence, which in turn enables us to move towards what Ricoeur calls "the ineluctable space of consideration due to every human being, in particular [the] guilty" (2004, 458). It is only from this space that, understanding our obligations to the guilty gets us beyond mere hatred in order to discover new things about Teale.

Without destabilizing one's internal boundaries, critical self-examination, undecidability and authentic decision-making remain unattainable. Perhaps more simply, *the opportunity to choose otherwise* is permanently closed off by the refusal of self-reflection. As William Connolly points out, "Hegemonic identities depend on existing definitions

of difference to be. To alter your recognition of difference, therefore is to revise your own terms of self-recognition as well. Critical responsiveness thus moves on two registers: to redefine its relation to others a constituency must also modify the shape of its own identity" (1995, xvi). Our relationship with ourselves shapes how we feel about and respond to the loss and pain that atrocities provoke, and how this feeling shapes or distorts our relationship with others.[18]

Self-reflection is important partly because of its potential to enhance one's sense of responsibility, which is only possible once our defensive attachments have been revealed and disrupted. Critically rethinking our relationships to ourselves creates the possibility for what Kelly Oliver calls a radical kind of responsibility that "holds ourselves responsible not only for our actions and beliefs, but also for our unconscious desires and fears" (2003, 280). Responsibility for the unconscious aspects of our selves is seemingly beyond our capacity, perhaps more demanding than the flexibility called for by Derrida's ordeal of undecidability. In any case, both have interesting consequences for how we, as selves, relate to others and otherness. The question we can now consider is, how does critical self-reflection influence our engagement with the guilty?

Reflecting upon one's relationship to others and otherness: Honoring alterity and diffusing retributive attachments

Only from this critical reflection on one's attachments can the tendency to treat others according to convention be challenged. One's engagement with undecidability creates the necessary psychological space from which to imagine and create new forms of togetherness. By critically reflecting upon their engagement with otherness, people might then "attempt to consider experiences outside of themselves and, if carefully thought about, attempt

the fragile work of extending the self in relation to what is other to and beyond the self" (Britzman 2000, 44). This fragile work entails a shift in how we reflect upon and construe our relationships to the guilty at interpersonal and social levels.

The kind of togetherness that is constituted in relationships directs the potential for either authentic decision-making or the perpetuation of resentment. Sharon Todd illustrates the safety of a conventional understanding of togetherness, through Zygmunt Bauman's relational modality called being-with: "Being-with…is a mode of communication…whereby people may have interesting interactions but are not transformed by them. As a consequence, aspects of the self are engaged in ways that are normative and safe" (2003, 47). But since undecidability brings us to an encounter with what is risky, certainly we cannot face the ordeal from this safe place. Bauman says "conventions substitute *concern with the rule* for the concern for the partner of encounter…" (1993, 56, emphasis added). In other words, instead of dealing with the messiness and inherent riskiness of unpredictable encounters with others, we become caught up in the rules of engagement. The project of being-with is concerned with following the rules; it is a safe venture. Forms of togetherness informed by being-with, therefore, tend to conform to, rather than challenge conventional rules of resentment and revenge; this modality negates authentic choice.

Against this orientation, Caputo says that forgiveness, understood in terms of the negotiation between the conditional and unconditional, "makes new forms of subjectivity possible, even as revenge condemns us to repeat the past in endless cycles. Forgiveness releases and opens; revenge traps,

incarcerates, and closes" (2000, 39). And this claim gains strength given the deconstructed understanding that one's capacity to ethically contemplate forgiveness is created through one's ability to fall into a state of undecidability. It is within this state that the forgiver and the forgiven are always at risk of being taken by surprise.[19] Moreover, according to Jankélévitch, forgiveness involves "the absence of every reservation" (2005, 154).

Forging new ways of being with otherness entails what Bauman calls a "more complete" encounter with people: *being-for* (1993, 51). This encounter depicts moments when, as Todd goes on to describe, "people actually break through convention (and people, of course, do). It is a mode of relationality that is not governed by rules" (2003, 47). Todd contends that "being-for the Other is a togetherness born out of immediacy of interaction, a communicative gesture that does not have as its end anything except its own communicativeness, its own response" (2003, 48). Both relationality and unpredictability of being-for described by Bauman and Todd resonates with Derrida's ordeal of undecidability; both mark a departure from the conventions and predetermined choices that foreclose the opportunity for thinking anew.

What does being-for demand in terms of psychological flexibility? Following from the insights of internal or intrapsychic reflection, being-for demands critical reflection on how one's relationship to oneself shapes one's relationship to others and Otherness. Whereas I said in the previous section that our ability to reflect honestly about our attachments to various assumptions about ourselves entails momentarily denying the ego's defenses, reflecting honestly about our relationships and responsibilities to

others involves a radical kind of openness of the ego towards what is Other; a kind of attentiveness wherein we allow ourselves to the overwhelmed by another's alterity.[20] This attentiveness calls for what Todd describes as Levinas's "requirement of the self to depose its ego, its intentionality and consciousness, in the service of the Other" (2003 52). Rethinking one's relationship to the Other as being in service of the Other requires that we rethink our current assumptions about relationality, namely the privileging of similarities and the subversion of differences.

Addressing again the need to challenge how we cope with the knowledge of unwanted togetherness, our project at the interpersonal level shifts from internal attachments to external projections. Britzman, referring to the insights of Ernst van Alpen, says that "to work through defenses against the inconceivable, [e.g., forgiving the unforgivable] without transferring his own aggression onto the other, he must refind, not the ego's boundaries, but the capacity to live without the boundaries that preclude the experience of the other" (Britzman, referring to van Alpen, 47). Here begins the work of making space for the psychological experience of the other.

One's capacity to engage in new ways of relating to otherness will depend in part on one's ability to relate to difficulty. This will mean, as Britzman points out, studying

> how one comes to relate to the conditions of difficulty, expressed, as opposed to somehow attempt to reacquire the felt experience of the other. To be receptive to the difficulties of the other is not the same as feeling another's pain, itself impossible. [...] To make relevant experiences beyond one's own, indeed, even within one's own realm,

> means that one must work through the remittances that primary identifications put into place (38).

We need to imagine ways to relate to the other that do not operate within the "confines of the narcissistic impulse to control and judge" (Britzman, 38). Before discussing the kind of flexibility that dealing ethically with unwanted togetherness entails at the interpersonal level, the stakes of our narcissistic inclinations need to be evaluated.

Conventional understandings of forgiveness and decision tend to maintain and revert back to existing relationships, by subverting difference and otherness, and indeed the call for authentic choice. Reconciliation, seen as the mending of past relationships, operates in this way. An engagement with undecidability, however, challenges our tendency to privilege only negative aspects of the wrongdoer and respond narcissistically to what is Other. Psychoanalyst Jessica Benjamin offers a description that helps actualize the link between the inability to recognize difference and violence towards the other. Within psychoanalysis, the denial of difference is referred to as narcissism or omnipotence. Benjamin, referring to Irigaray's feminist critique of narcissism, contends:

> Psychoanalytically, we associate violence with the problem of omnipotence. By omnipotence, we mean not merely a wish, but a mental state, generally understood as one of undifferentiation. In this state we are unable to take in that the other person does not want what we want, do what we say.
>
> Violence is the outer perimeter of the less dramatic tendency of the subject to force the other to either be or want what it wants, to assimilate the other to itself or make it a threat. It is the extension of

> reducing difference to sameness, the inability to recognize the other without dissolving her/his otherness. (Benjamin, 86)

In other words, in failing to recognize another's alterity, the specific wants, needs and beliefs of that person are also denied. The significance of this psychoanalytic perspective for forgiveness is that it acknowledges the unconscious elements at work in conventional forgiveness: forgiveness given on the condition that the wrongdoer repent, makes the forgiver's *desire to change the wrongdoer* salient. This privileging of contrition shapes the way the forgiver projects his own demands onto the wrongdoer. This kind of forgiveness makes specific demands on the wrongdoer, for example, that she transform her moral attitudes and behaviour. But the risk here is twofold: having to conform to the forgiver's conscious and unconscious desires for sameness, the wrongdoer either conforms by being sufficiently contrite, thereby effectively annihilating and overlooking the negative attributes of his/her alterity; or in cases where the wrongdoer refuses to transform in the service of the forgiver, the wrongdoer's alterity becomes the over-privileged focus. In cases where the other becomes completely Othered, opportunities for forgiveness appear forsaken.

Both of these scenarios uphold one's internal attachments to so-called intrinsic characteristics of the forgiver and forgiven as innocent and guilty. Moreover, upholding this dichotomy annuls the possibility of engaging in the dialectic of the conditional and unconditional: one continues to avoid undecidability by keeping oneself within the conditional logic. Within this logic, conventional tendencies and attachments are upheld and we rely on our narcissistic defenses in order to protect ourselves from

having to experience what is both unfamiliar and psychologically destabilizing.

Another way that conventional forms of forgiveness attempt to reconcile differences is exemplified in Enright and North's account of *reframing*. Andrews, referring to this work, describes reframing as an imagined encounter where "the person who has suffered imagines what the position of the other might be" (2000, 79). This encounter is intended to "build up a complete picture of the wrongdoer and his actions" (In Enright and North 1998, 24). Reframing is not a process intended to make excuses for or condone the wrongdoer's actions; North contends it is, however, a way "to encourage more positive feelings of compassion and empathy" towards a person one simultaneously recognizes as guilty (1998, 25). The project of reframing suggests that our ability to forgive (different from our ability to *contemplate* forgiveness) is compromised by having insufficient information about the person we wish to forgive. Creating a new and more informed story about the other makes his/her actions more comprehensible and acceptable to the person seeking to forgive. This is a common and often helpful tactic for conventional reconciliation between acquaintances. However, reframing appears to shift our attention away from the critical examination of resentment to the valuation of the other person's life. This shift from self-reflection to reflection about the wrongdoer calls for empathy and tolerance. But Derrida points to the problem of tolerance: "By being tolerant, one admits the other under one's own conditions, and thus under one's authority" (in Borradori 2003, 163). The practice of reframing works to maintain, rather than to change existing relations.

Against the tendency to look for more favorable and understandable accounts of the other and keep the adverse at bay, however, Jankélévitch says, "The supernaturality of forgiveness consists in this, that my opinion on the subject of the guilty person precisely has not changed; but against this immutable background it is the whole lighting of my relations with the guilty person that is modified, it is the whole orientation of our relations that finds itself inverted, overturned, and overwhelmed!" (2005, 152). Challenging conventional forms of togetherness, therefore, calls on us to reinvent the way we conceive of our relationship to what is guilty, rather than trying to transform the guilt into something more manageable. Derrida believes that we must not excuse the guilty through this kind of narcissistic identification. He denies that ethical decisions about forgiveness can arise "if consequently [the forgiven] expiates and thus identifies, in view of redemption and reconciliation, with the one of whom he asks forgiveness" (2001, 28). Derrida protests this tendency, asserting instead that forgiving the repentant wrongdoer is like forgiving someone different from the one who committed the crime; the wrongdoer is "no longer guilty through and through, but already another, and better than the guilty one. To this extent, and on this condition, it is no longer the *guilty as such* who is forgiven" (Derrida 2005, 35). Because deconstructed understandings of forgiveness do not solely index the forgivability of the wrongdoer, the other's alterity is not easily diffused (by asking the other to repent, reform, apologize) nor is otherness completely othered through a refusal to forgive. Smith points out that conditional and calculated forgiveness, typical within the popularized model, does not "properly welcome the other *as* Other; rather, it establishes conditions of welcome that diminish the alterity of the other" (2005, 72).

Being aware of one's interests and actively working against the tendency to project one's own unwarranted or unacceptable desires and emotions onto others is no small task. But the outcome is no less significant. Considering alternative responses to the typical response of revenge creates space for subversive forms of encounter. Forgiveness stops being about oneself, one's own therapy, and starts being about the possibility for a more ethical relation to another. As Arendt points out, "Forgiving and the relationship it establishes is always an eminently personal (though not necessarily individual or private) affair in which *what* was done is forgiven for the sake of *who* did it" (1998, 241). This resonates with Derrida's call for relationality wherein we "learn to live with ghosts, in the upkeep, the conversation, the company, of the companionship… To love otherwise, and better. No, not better, more justly. But *with them*" (1994, xviii). We can learn to live more ethically with the haunting perpetuated by loss.

I will mention one final point about the value of reflective capacities gained through an encounter with undecidability. An ethical negotiation with forgiveness also entails that we reflect socially on how our behaviour conforms to or contradicts conventional models of togetherness. Such reflection challenges our attachments to retributive tendencies by upsetting the conventional practice of avoiding critical self-reflection and the ordeal of undecidability. Facing this ordeal, however, enables us to imagine our obligations to the guilty differently and potentially to strive towards more sustainable relations with others.

An engagement with undecidability, and more generally the negotiation between conditional and unconditional logics, destabilize the innocent/guilty dichotomy. By keeping both logics in mind, the privileged

and essentialized views of the victim as innocent, morally superior or forever wronged moves into the background. That is, the forgiver not only hopes to forego resentment and hatred towards the wrongdoer, but also foregoes superiority over the wrongdoer. The forgiver gives up her privileged attachments to her old self. At the scene of forgiveness, wherein the forgiver faces undecidability and chooses despite convention, there is a leveling between two. This is not to say that power relations disappear, but, we can shift what we make central to the negotiation of forgiveness. Ideally (note that this ideal is not attainable, but can act as a valuable moral reference point), forgiveness calls for us to make space wherein "the request for forgiveness and the offering of forgiveness [happen] on a place of equality and reciprocity" (Ricoeur 2004, 458). Looking towards this ideal makes otherwise rigid social structures more malleable. As John Caputo elucidates, "forgiveness loosens the knots of the social network, slackens the ties in the relations of power, even as revenge draws them tighter and makes them more intractable and oppressive" (2000, 39). Our honest engagements with undecidability keep our inclinations to punish, and our desires to give mercifully in check. Social relations are shaped by this negotiation, or 'holding in place' of both logics. As a result, our decisions become informed by more complicated negotiations than are allowed by our commitments to reconciliation or retribution. Grappling with my deep commitments to justice, safety, mercy, punishment and compassion has introduced me to alternative ways of thinking about my obligations to myself and Karla Teale. According to the deconstructed view, it is the grappling element that makes this approach ethical.

The things we might learn about ourselves in our attempts to experience a more ethical forgiveness could help us to live better with others in the aftermath of inexpiable acts. This learning experience demands a kind of commitment to others that seems absurd at times. Absurd commitments call for what Kristeva calls the "suspension of judgment" (2002, 281). And this suspension seems to bring about a fleeting suspension of reason. It does mean, however, that we must remind ourselves of forgiveness, and keep our resentment in check. This kind of engagement with forgiveness calls for forbearance.

It seems reasonable that if we accept that the value of forgiveness arises out of the faculties we gain through reflecting upon it or experiencing it, then forgiveness can be valued as an important capacity to keep in mind when thinking about my hypothetical or real encounter with Teale.

CONCLUSION:
Implications of and Possibilities for a Radicalized Forgiveness: Rethinking Obligations to Karla Teale

My project has explored various understandings of conventional and radical interpretations of forgiveness in an ongoing attempt to challenge the ways we think about togetherness, post-atrocity. The scene of unwanted togetherness, wherein we encounter losses that challenge our ability to respond ethically, is a scene from which to contest the tendency to hold onto questionable (i.e., defensive and morally unjustified) forms of resentment and desires for revenge that perpetuate rather than end cycles of interpersonal violence.

My investigation has challenged two principal assumptions about forgiveness: first that the "unforgivable" cannot be forgiven, and second, that resentment towards the wrongdoer is morally justified. Forgiveness, as seen through the lens of deconstruction, is propelled rather than annulled by the "unforgivable". Moreover, deconstruction shows that punishment and forgiveness are necessary but also irreconcilable; over-privileging retributive forms of justice does not justify the refusal to forgive and the consequent attachments to unfettered resentment.

In my investigation of the ethicality of forgiveness, I contrasted conventional and intersubjective understandings in order to demonstrate that the two approaches construe the project of forgiveness differently. On one hand, conventional understandings value forgiveness for its reconciliatory and retributive capacities, whereby various steps are taken in order to mend past relations where this is possible and to punish the wrongdoer where it is not. On the other hand, intersubjective understandings value forgiveness—if and when it is appropriate—for its ability to curb feelings of resentment and

desires for vengeance. A consequence of conventional understanding is that forgiveness, especially in relation to heinous and unforgivable crimes, ends up being informed by vindictive inclinations. These inclinations, at worst, drive people towards retributive violence, and at best, fuel a sense of self-justified entitlement to judge.

From this dilemma, I turned to a radicalized view of forgiveness, promoting deconstruction as a theoretical way to disrupt and challenge the privileging of conventional views and practices of forgiveness. The paradoxical relationship between conditional and unconditional logics of forgiveness informs an altogether different kind of project: Derrida believes that it is only through the negotiation of both logics that we can make more ethical decisions about forgiveness. The space opened by this negotiation makes room for the ordeal of undecidability; we must choose while in a state of total indecision wherein we refuse to be guided merely by our inclinations. This venture is a risky one; it calls on us to let go of many of our attachments and false comforts. Creating psychological space for undecidability involves several shifts in one's relationship to one's self and to others.

This project, as I have articulated it, has been framed in terms of the recent release of Canada's most notorious female murderer, Karla Homolka. Given what I argued about the possibilities for more ethical negotiations of forgiveness and the kind of togetherness it calls for, how would I now respond to an encounter with Karla Teale?

Before answering this question, another one first deserves attention. Namely, do I have the right or responsibility to contemplate forgiving Teale? Newberry's discussion of morally justifiable resentment—which

creates the occasion for forgiveness—concludes that "if resentment is the result of moral injury, it is irrational to resent when no moral injury has occurred" (2001, 236). But part of what made Homolka's actions so heinous is that they violated *social* norms; her actions were seen by many Canadians as harmful for all people, not simply the girls themselves and their families. A narrow construal of forgiveness—as Andrews puts it, "only those who have suffered can forgive and only those who have committed a wrongdoing can be forgiven"—certainly has merit; it may not be appropriate for those who are outside the effects of her harm to grant forgiveness (Andrews 2000, 108). From this perspective, it appears that it is naïve to construe my hypothetical encounter with Karla Teale as involving forgiveness. First, I suffered no direct harm as a result of the actions of Homolka. Second, the pain suffered by both Kristen French and Leslie Mahaffy is unknowable to me, as is the pain of their parents. Third, any attempt to try and identify with this experience in order to think about forgiveness seems not only inappropriate and unwarranted, but also ineffective. There is a real sense in which it is not up to me to contemplate forgiveness for crimes committed against other people.

But this orientation towards Teale still configures forgiveness as being about *a person's right to give or withhold it*. This configuration is committed to an understanding of forgiveness that Chapter Two (deconstruction, more generally) aims to reject. Questioning my 'right' to forgive is already bound up in assumptions about moral authority and judgment, in addition to being about an exchange: whether I can *give* Teale forgiveness. Rather, forgiveness is an encounter that becomes relevant at the onset of resentment. This new idea of resentment is *not* about rights or

giving. We must forget about the etiology of giving forgiveness in order to begin seeing forgiveness as a way to encounter one's resentment. This encounter does not make central questions about who deserves it and who can give it; it is about how I responded to Homolka and how I want to respond to Teale now.

Moreover, construing forgiveness as a person's right forecloses what I find to be central to my project here: a critical examination of the social resentment that is directed at Karla Teale today. To simply say that such resentment is unwarranted is to cancel in advance any critical examination of the reasons *why* we feel this way about her.

Returning to the original question of how I would respond to Teale, the first thing that becomes clear to me is that my honest negotiation with forgiveness would entail bringing to the surface, rather than denying or ignoring, the resentment I feel towards her. I am called upon to admit my hatred and acknowledge the disgust I feel when I think of her as the woman who drugged, raped, murdered and dismembered those two girls. I must make room within my self for the painful and troubling knowledge of Homolka's actions.

In the wake of these feelings of hatred and nausea, however, I face the difficult task of critically examining these sentiments. Acknowledging the presence of my feelings of resentment does not necessarily make them morally justified. I must examine the story that informs this tendency to grab onto resentment that may not be warranted. If my resentment towards her is not influenced by self-protection, then what *is* shaping my hatred? As my work has shown, our sentiments towards others are often shaped by our relationships to our selves. Psychological attachments to feelings towards

past wrongs often justify current hatred towards others. Homolka's actions defied what most were willing to conceive as forgivable. But my exploration of the ethicality of forgiveness has attempted to show that the social fact of Teale's 'unforgivability' has perhaps less to do with *her actions* and more to do with our inability to critically examine *our own defensive attachments and retributive desires*. While my feelings of hatred are maintained by memories of what Homolka did to those girls over twelve years ago, my attachment to these memories does not morally justify my ongoing resentment and judgment.

It remains unclear to me whether the resentment I am psychologically attached to is created by hanging on to the pain of past wrongs, or whether it is upheld by a desire to hold self-justified hatred. A friend recently told me that she is more comfortable being angry than feeling sad; for her, sadness seems less controllable and more disparaging than hatred. Similarly, I find that I often evoke anger in order to replace feelings of sadness and hopelessness with vindictive sentiments that undercut the experience of loss. In such cases, my experience of resentment is more often fuelled by a kind of affection for hatred rather than a response to a painful loss.

Unpacking what it means to resent has become a central component to my examination of forgiveness. In fact, it appears that reflecting upon my own resentment shifts my overall project. Whereas I began by looking at forgiveness as a viable way to overcome the problem of resentment, it now appears that the way we understand resentment and orientate towards revenge could in fact make forgiveness a more accessible encounter.

Critically examining my attachments to resentment challenges me to step down from a self-justified position of authority; the place from which I find myself unrelentingly judging others. In shifting away from this position, I lose my footing: giving up my right to judge Teale disturbs my dependency on my vindictive sentiments. I am able to see that this dependency is nourished by the assumption that *how I respond to Teale reflects how heinous her crimes were*. In this sense, withholding forgiveness was a kind of public testimonial to how evil Homolka was. But this view reveals an even deeper commitment to a very normative understanding of forgiveness: one that views forgiveness as a right.

Reflecting upon what I am in fact attached to (the pain of loss or the affinity to hatred) is morally and psychologically strenuous and confusing. Doing this, however, I actually make space for myself as a self that does not conform strictly to one set of attachments. This experience is liberating for the self and the other; not only do I loosen my grip on these psychologically draining investments of hatred, but I also am able to release Homolka from the negative space she occupied within me. None of this denies the evil of her crimes or the reality of her guilt. The realm of legal justice is not disrupted by my experience. But my part in the perpetuation the social judgment is disrupted.

Loosening my grip on vindictive feelings changes the attachments I have to a certain kind of togetherness. The understanding of togetherness I previously valued privileged relationships that I could willingly maintain, ignore or cope with. This understanding privileged a being-with mode; positive relationships are understood as meaningful whereas negative relationships are not. This becomes difficult when others' actions contradict

this way of being. Homolka was thrust into our lives when she was charged in the deaths of French and Mahaffy. Her actions were not to be ignored. But my understanding did not include space for this kind of unwanted togetherness, togetherness that seemed too taxing, too upsetting to have to reckon with: the immorality of Homolka's crimes challenged my views of ethical behaviour in ways that cannot be reconciled with or fully expelled. Keeping in mind the idea of 'flexible self-narratives,' or what Kristeva calls narratives of 'free-association,' allows for me to negotiate the irreconcilable responses that Homolka's actions provoke. This flexibility enables me to see that it is not problematic to hold the following beliefs: a) I am against the kind interpersonal violence created and perpetuated by Homolka's actions, and b) I am committed to promoting the well-being of Teale today. Moreover, my flexible self-narrative does not make space for these conflicting views by believing, in addition to a) and b), that c) she is now a different person who would no longer commit such crimes. I am aware of the reality that Teale may re-offend. Recognizing this disheartening possibility does not overshadow other possibilities however, nor does it lessen my responsibility to challenge my resentment or commit to the well-being of others.

Forgiveness, as I have described it, encapsulates a radicalized notion of ethics and has several normative implications: it reveals and criticizes morally unjustified resentment and discourages vindictive tendencies. Forgiveness also encourages us to think of others and ourselves in more reflective and responsive ways. Perhaps most importantly, the negotiation of forgiveness shifts us into a space from which to consider acting otherwise. There is a tendency within Canada to relentlessly condemn the guilty in

ways that do not correct social wrongs, but perpetuate them. Keeping the proposed ethic in mind causes us to reflect on the very real effects of our judgment and refigure our obligations to the Other.

While this ethic has various reflective and psychological consequences for social behaviour, its implications for moral theory must also be considered. The ethics I have argued for urges us to enter into a risky state. Having entered that state, however, we find ourselves without guidance. We are left asking: if the moment of decision is without reason and without resolution, how can it guide us to the ethical? Part of the answer, as I have attempted to show, is that part of what it means to be ethical—in addition to following the principles we believe to be righteous and good—is to face the reality that we are always at risk of being unfair and unreasonable in our attempts to conform to moral conventions. My project suggests that one's ethicality is asserted when we allow for the negotiation between conventional loyalties and unconditional compassion. And so while I find myself waiting, as Jankélévitch did, for a sign of contrition from Teale, I also find myself wanting to see her face-to-face: to give her a glance that is inviting. Ethical behaviour requires balancing or holding in place of contradictory attachments. This demanding dialectic offers us a new way to reckon with the realities of loss and the hatred that accompanies it.

ENDNOTES

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[1] The plea bargain between Homolka and the Crown was infamously dubbed a "deal with the devil" by the Canadian media.

[2] "One particularly controversial aspect of Homolka's plea agreement was the Crown's belief that she was a 'compliant victim,' the justification of which came largely from an FBI document titled *Compliant Victims of the Sexual Sadist*" see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karla_Homolka

[3] c.f. Zygmunt Bauman's *Life in Fragments* (50) and Sharon Todd's *Learning from the Other* (46-63).

[4] It is interesting to note here that Homolka and Bernardo were also tried by the courts for the rape and murder of Homolka's younger sister, Tammy Homolka. The cause of death was ruled accidental (Tammy Homolka is said to have choked to death on her own vomit, while intoxicated, and drugged by her sister). No charges were laid in her death. Karla Homolka's mother was united with her upon her release, their relationship reconciled not only despite Homolka's crimes against French and Mahaffy, but also against her sister.

[5] Claudia Card discusses forgiveness as power between men and women in sexist relationships in a way that problematizes forgiveness in abusive relationships. She says that, "victims of exploitation may be further exploited by oppressors who take advantage of this vulnerability by encouraging feelings of virtue for the readiness to forgive. Women often find themselves in this position in sexist relationships, where there is often much to forgive and women are praised for being 'understanding'" (Card, *The Atrocity Paradigm*, 174, *see references for full bibliography*). In the same vein, I am not convinced that a person can forgive another person if the harm is ongoing.

[6] This broad domain consists of a range of views, including philosophical, psychological and clinical theorizations. This domain is not restricted to strictly academic views however.

[7] This ambiguous term leaves open whether persons can forgive other intentional beings, e.g., non-human animals. It also leaves open the debate as to whether people can forgive God. For the purposes of this project I will limit myself to forgiveness between moral agents (persons).

[8] This does not bar a group of people from harming another group, but it does bar (for my purposes) forgiving oneself. Forgiving oneself is an important and interesting issue that deserves attention that is outside the scope of this project. For a philosophical look at self-forgiveness, see Robin S. Dillon's "Self-Forgiveness and Self-Respect" in *Ethics* 112 (October 2001): 53-83.

[9] For a moderately interesting and insightful article about Canadian attitudes surrounding Teale's release, see "Karla Homolka Set to be Released in July," in *MacLean's* at http://www.tceplus.com/index.cfm?PgNm=TCE&Params=M1ARTM0012741.

[10] Transcripts of the interview can be found at www.cbc.ca.

[11] Philosophers who support the idea that forgiveness is linked to positive assertions of self or self-esteem include: Jeffrie Murphy, 1988; Robin S Dillon, 2001; Kelly Oliver, 2003.

[12] I do acknowledge that a person's reflective views of self are shaped by societal views (and vice versa). My point here is that personal reflection, especially critical self-reflection, can bring about insights concerning one's self that are not reflected by societal views.

[13] In *Macleans Magazine*, http://www.tceplus.com/index.cfm?PgNm=TCE&Params=M1ARTM0012741

[14] Please see http://www.elizabethfry.ca/caefs_e.htm for further information on the purpose of and principles behind the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies (CAEFS).

[15] Elizabeth Roudinesco sees the abolition of the death penalty as an act that somehow obliges unconditional forgiveness. See *For What Tomorrow...* pp. 160-162.

[16] Reconstructive narratives tend to operate on assumptions of 'restoration' and assume that the self that existed before is what needs to be rebuilt. Reconstructive attempts make assumptions about the wholeness or completeness of the previous self.

[17] For more on Ozick's view of innocence post-atrocity, specifically in reference to the publicity battles of *The Diary of Anne Frank* see Deborah P. Britzman in *Between Hope and Despair*.

[18] Negotiating the uncertainty of forgiveness requires deep changes to self, however, such changes do not require a monadic model of internality wherein change-to-self takes place through solitary-reflection-on-self. These reflective moments are always already engaged in the world and should not be thought of as solitary endeavors.

[19] Nicholas Royle, referring to a writer, not a forgiver, in *Routledge Critical Thinkers: Jacques Derrida.* (London: Routledge, 2003) p. 56

[20] Susan Bickford citing Corradi Fiumara (1990) in *The Dissonance of Democracy,* p.145 (*Full bibliographic details in References).*

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Whether to live with evils and their legacies is seldom a choice. The questions are about how to do it well, especially, how to interrupt cycles of hostility generated by past evils and replace mutual ill will with good.

Claudia Card, *The Atrocity Paradigm*